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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 000668

SIPDIS

CAIRO FOR MAXSTADT

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: VISIT TO KWARA STATE

REF: ABUJA 404

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reason: 1.5(d).

11. (U) Summary: Poloff traveled to the Kwara State capital of Ilorin on March 17 and met with officials from the People's Democratic Party and with the National Democratic Party gubernatorial Candidate. End Summary.

12. (C) The political situation in Kwara has been extremely tense in recent months. All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) Governor Mohammed Lawal, a retired military officer, was once a protege of Dr. Abubakar Olusola (Sola) Saraki, the perennial strongman of Kwara politics. Once associates, the two men are now bitter enemies. This personal feud also reverberates across the ethnic landscape of the state. Saraki is a product of the Hausa/Fulani emirate system. As a member of one of the royal families in Ilorin, Lawal has publicly claimed to be a descendant of the maverick Yoruba leader who pulled Ilorin away from the crumbling Oyo (Yoruba) Empire centuries ago. Lawal is seeking reelection. Saraki is promoting his own son, Bukola, for the seat. The history between Saraki and Lawal, and the fact that Bukola is his father's proxy, has spoiled the political atmosphere, making for a tense, often violent, campaign. Saraki the elder and younger left the ANPP after Lawal's ascent to governor, and joined the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

13. (C) One of the issues behind the conflict is the naming of traditional rulers. Lawal has promoted more than twenty Yoruba traditional rulers, vowing to "return the lost status of the Yoruba." Additionally, court challenges to the nomination of title-holders in the Ilorin Emirate have come from both Lawal and Ilorin Emir Gambari (a Saraki supporter and brother of Ibrahim Gambari, Foreign Minister during the Buhari Administration, Nigeria's longest-serving UN Permanent Representative, and now Under Secretary for Africa and the United Nations), with each seeking to limit the influence of the other. The fallout between Saraki and Lawal has created a real showdown in the state. Will Saraki continue to orchestrate politics in the state or will Lawal replace him as the big man, becoming both king and kingmaker himself?

14. (U) Poloff noticed a heightened state of security around the residential compounds of the gubernatorial candidates, as well as riot police patrolling the town. The Embassy vehicle was required to go through three different PDP security checkpoints to reach the State Chairman. The PDP representatives made numerous allegations of violence and repressive actions taken by members and hired thugs of the All Nigerian People's Party (the party of the incumbent governor). Accusations ranged from tearing down posters and billboards, intimidation and physical assault of campaign personnel, and even that the governor himself gave the command to shoot PDP campaigners last month on the road to Benue State. Driving through town Poloff noted that there were many posters for the incumbent governor, and also for the Alliance for Democracy (AD) candidate (the former Chief of Staff to Lagos State governor, Bola Tinubu), but very few for the PDP candidate (in actuality we counted as many political ads for the PDP runner-up in the party convention).

15. (U) The NDP candidate denied that any threats had been made against him or his party in any way; however, he stated that the ANPP and PDP were simply gunning for each in the state capital and that the two parties were doing very little in the rest of the state.

16. (C) Comment: Given the contentious nature of politics in Kwara, the two main parties are wary and on guard against each other. The personal nature of the contest may make it

more intense. Dirty tricks and violence are in the den of both parties. The race literally may be hard-fought and hard-won. Lawal may have the inside track but it will be close. Saraki The Elder is a veteran and very wealthy politician and he will use all of his wiles and wealth to unseat Lawal, who, in Saraki's eyes, has turned out to be an ingrate protege. When asked about election day, PDP officials assured Poloff that they would have their own security personnel at each polling station, which does not bode well for a peaceful Election day.

JETER